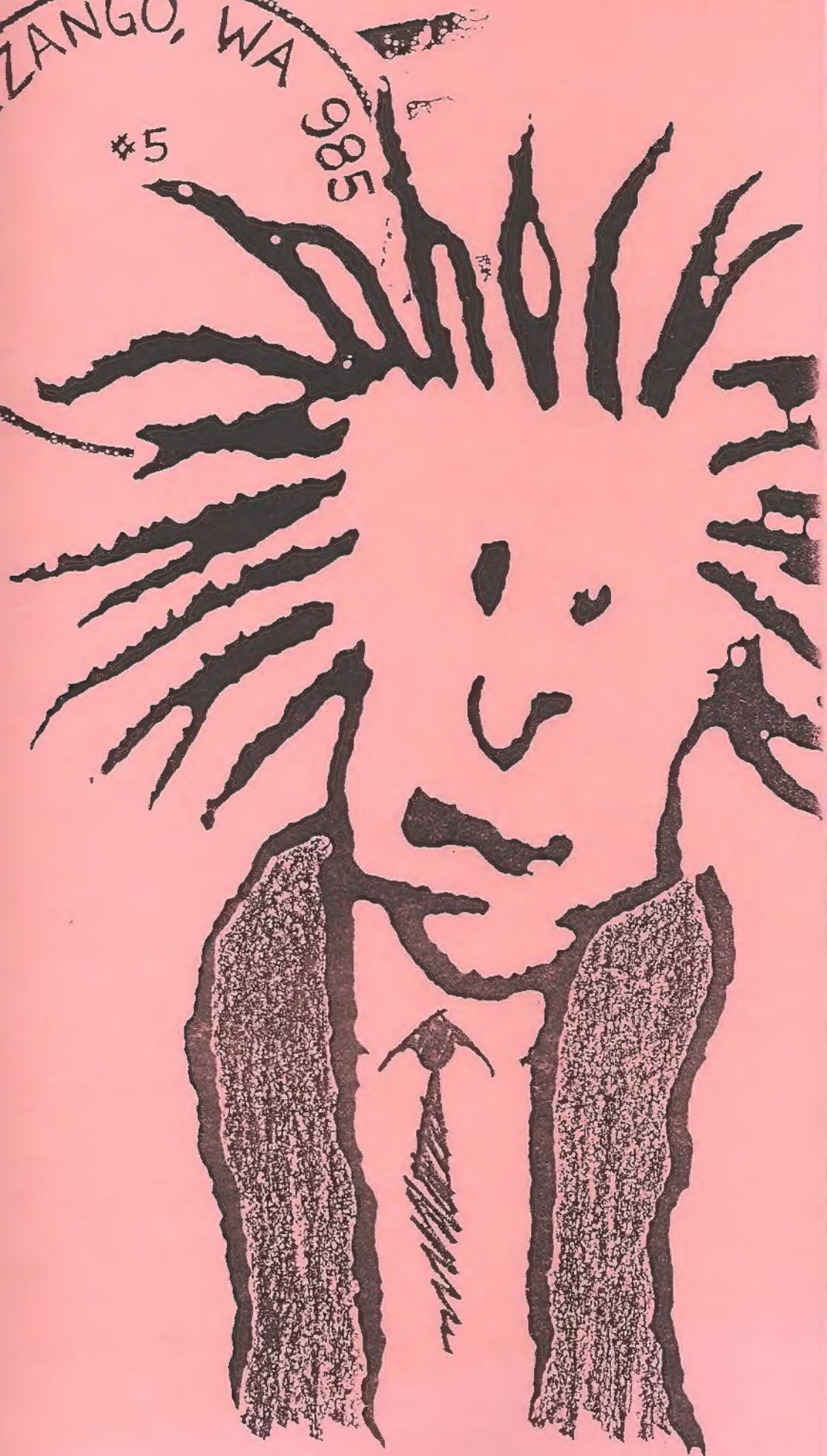




## Bezango, WA 985 #5

Back in the mid-1970s, a mysterious cabal of Californians set forth in motion a conspiracy that to this day has eluded an explanation. Busloads of women with long grey hair and earthtone clothes were dispatched to various towns in the Pacific Northwest. Their instructions: spend all day sitting in the corners of progressive coffee shops, affecting an air of detachment and superiority. If spoken to, be sure to react in a righteous and opinionated manner about the injustices of the world. Be angry. Never smile. Plaster the back of your European sub-compact with bumper stickers that all begin with words like, "STOP," "NO," and "DON'T."

But one by one, these coffee shops were replaced by the much more mainstream Starbucks franchise, and the grey ladies who were once so numerous are now an endangered species. That makes the woman who calls herself Chrysalis, Bezango's very own grey lady, a very special person.

Actually her real name is Eunice Turgidown. When the grey lady bus took a wrong turn at Winnehut (which is only 30 miles away as the crow flies, but much longer by road) back in 1971, Eunice was assigned to occupy Bezango. She immediately purchased Waldo Borker's 1959 VW Bug, and then set about looking for a progressive coffee shop.

Unfortunately for Eunice, the closest she could find was the single table and chair between the fast fried food counter and the Sno-Cone machine at the Mountain Beaver Gas Station/Mini Mart/and Lawn Ornament Emporium. And she has had to settle for the swill that passes for coffee at the MBGS/MM/&LOE since the drink the locals call "expresso" has yet to be marketed in town. In truth, the coffee at the MBGS/MM/&LOE is much stronger than espresso, especially when you get down to the chewable part.

Anyway, at some point last year, Eunice told Dr. Rudolf Nixon she never had and never would eat the mountain beaver burgers which are served at the Mountain Beaver Festival every year. In truth, very few local people are crazy enough to eat those things, but Eunice was the only one in town who was a true vegetarian with political/social reasons. But within the year, everyone in town would be a vegetarian, at least temporarily. And here's how ...







Dr. Rudolf Nixon never really went to college but granted himself a Ph. D. in philosophy anyway. Obtaining an accredited degree would have required him to leave Bezango for a time, something he vowed he would never do. He owns and operates the only TV station in town, which, for some weird reason, has to beam a signal to a satellite before local televisions pick it up. His bathroom also serves as his studio. As he will tell you, the acoustics are perfect in that room.

His station, KANT-TV, is the smallest in Washington State. So is his audience. Here's why. Most of Dr. Nixon's broadcast day is spent giving lectures about his hero and role model, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the philosopher who never traveled outside the area of Konigsberg, East Prussia. Dr. Nixon also delivers all of his discourses in the German language.

As it happens, the signals beamed up by KANT-TV are being monitored by an alien ship cloaked in the asteroid belt. They are using it as the basis for passing judgment on our mess of a world. They like what they see. Dr. Nixon doesn't know it, but he is, for the time being, saving our planet from **TOTAL ANNIHILATION!!!!** Please don't ask how I know this.

But let's move on. On one fateful day, Dr. Nixon used Eunice Turgidown's vegetarian rationale for refusing to eat mountain beaver burgers as an example in a lecture about ethics, free will and determinism. Only one person in Bezango was watching on that day.

Dr. Nixon's sole viewer, as usual, was Susie "Perky" Snacklebee. She knows enough German to be dangerous. An odd saying, I'll admit, but in this case you'll see what I mean.

Perky is always waiting for apologies that will ever come. Ever since she was small, her dream was to become the Queen of the Mountain Beaver Festival. But for 15 years in a row that honor has been bestowed on Oscar Sneedmoss, a big fellow who likes opening beer bottles with his teeth. So Perky can only sit to the side and fume.

Anyway, when Dr. Nixon mentioned Eunice and her refusal to eat mountain beaver burgers, Perky was able to make out a little bit of it, and more or less invented the rest of the story. It wasn't a deliberate lie, it was more like an embellishment of what she heard, or thought she heard.

Perky regards information as something of an art form, and enjoys savoring the fact that she is one of the few people in Bezango to have possession of certain knowledge. She loves it so much, that it is almost painful to give it up and donate these tidbits to the public good. And it is for the public good, or at least that is what she tells herself and the final push she needs to share special intelligence that would otherwise perish in obscurity.

So she told her neighbor, Stillman Waters, that Dr. Nixon announced on TV all local mountain beavers are rabid, and hence there will be no mountain beaver burgers this year.





Stillman Waters, known as Still Waters, likes to wear his Hawaiian theme bathrobe. Never mind it is a couple sizes too small and almost threadbare. He wears it everywhere. All day. In short, he's sort of goofy. Still Waters has so many screwy things rattling around in his head that by the time he got around to repeating Perky's hot news, it was somewhat diluted.

He told "Flappy" McGee this: There will be no mountain beaver meat in the mountain beaver burgers this year. Instead it will be quietly substituted with rabbit meat. The mountain beavers were all killed by our former mayor.

As you might recall, the former mayor he is talking about was a very popular dog who caused a political crisis when he ran away into the hills during his fourth term. In fact, he was last seen a number of years ago, diving into a mountain beaver tunnel. Although he is most likely dead by now, some say they can pick out his howl in the nightly coyote chorus.

Bezango does have a strip mall. It has three storefronts. At any given time, one of them is always empty, "The empty bullet chamber in a game of economic Russian roulette," is how Mr. Duckwart, the Homer T. Bone High School history teacher likes to describe the vacant spot. No enterprise has ever lasted longer than six months in this strip mall.

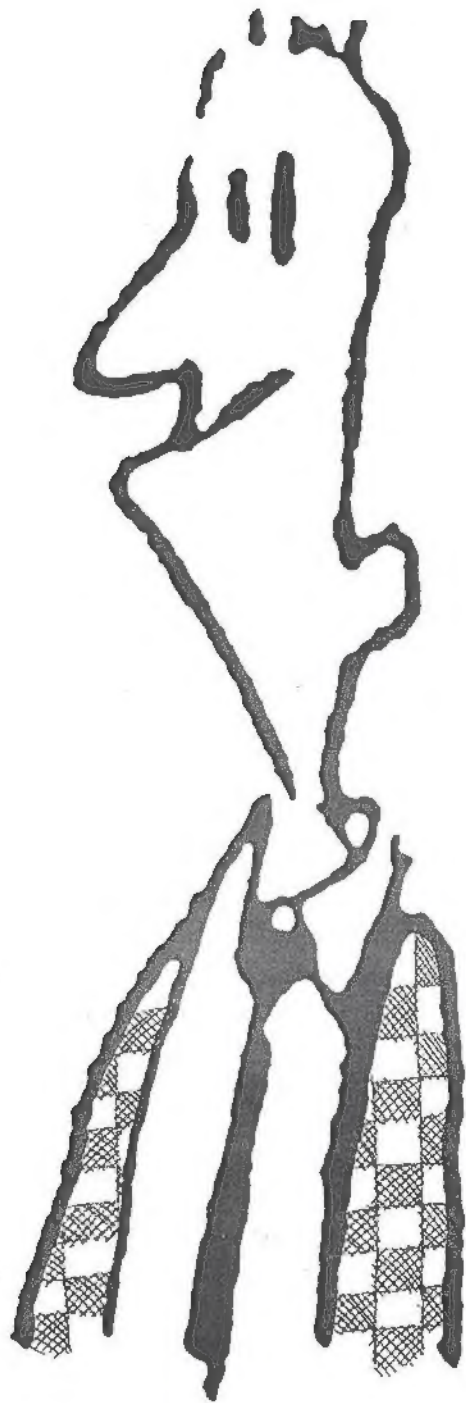
"Flappy" McGee occupied one of the strip mall stores. His business was called MOSTLY BUTTER! Flappy wore a white uniform with a cardboard box on his head. This box has been designed to resemble a cube of butter. 95% of the store's inventory was made up of butter in various forms. Ask him if he had margarine, or whipped cream, or milk, and he'd answer with gusto, "Yes, but we're ... (pause, then with a radio punch), mostly butter!!!" It was fun to ask for non-butter products just to watch his performance. Notice this is all described as past tense. That's right, MOSTLY BUTTER lasted a mere three months.

But Still Waters did ask for butter. On a stick. To eat. By itself. Disgusting or what? During one such visit, he dropped his news about the mountain beaver burgers. Flappy was busy with an elaborate display-window diorama on great historical moments of butter making, so he only half heard the news. But he absorbed enough to be very alarmed. And he ran to his strip mall neighbor with the bulletin.

Flappy said he had it from a good source that the canine former mayor, the beloved dog, was ground up and to be served in the guise of mountain beaver burgers.







The man who heard Flappy's news was important indeed. Not only was Buncombe "Bunky" Dragon the proprietor of the SOCKS 4 U store (an establishment that sold nothing but socks), but he was also the chairman of the Mountain Beaver Festival Committee. In addition he served as Treasurer of the Bezango Chamber of Commerce. Bunky had a real estate business too, and was Bezango's most ardent proponent of development. He once told a crowd at a City Council meeting that if more development meant polluting the water supply, we could all simply drink bottled water.

Anyway, Flappy's message was not garbled here. Bunky knew if word got out that the former mayor was in the mountain beaver burgers, that would be bad for the Mountain Beaver Festival, bad for business, and bad for Bezango. So Bunky decided to do something that would have made a nice case study for one of Dr. Nixon's lectures. He lied. Or, as Bunky preferred to think of it, he adapted to a difficult situation for the good of the town.

Bunky told every SOCKS 4 U customer that he, Bunky, recently saw the former mayor running around the woods as healthy as can be. He saw him while he, Bunky, was personally in the act of capturing big fat mountain beavers for the burgers. This seemed like a good idea, except Bunky only had one customer that day. The following evening, Bunky "left between two days" (as they say in Bezango) with the lion's share of the Bezango Chamber of Commerce treasury. He remains at large. He was last seen in Olympia hanging around the legislative buildings.

The only SOCKS 4 U customer that day, and thus the only person to keep Bunky's lie alive was Elton Flemm, the night clerk at the Harry Arms, a hotel once owned by Harry Thiessen but now owned by the Bank of Bezango. Elton was not noted for having a sense of humor, nor for being a great conversationalist. He mumbled his words. And no matter what the subject, within three minutes he would always work in the fact that his mother was once in the same bowling league as country singer Roy Acuff's wife.

Elton is one of the few folks in Bezango who can speak and understand German, but he won't watch Dr. Nixon's televised lectures. Elton says he's not sure he should see it, since he might "get ideas."

Anyway. Elton went around town repeating his version of the mountain beaver burger problem. Somehow, perhaps due to his mumbling, it came out that the former mayor was alive and well and living life as man's best friend of the King. Yes, the dog who was once mayor of Bezango is now Elvis Presley's pet. And how does Elton know this? Hey, a guy who had a mother who was once in the same bowling league as Roy Acuff's wife has connections. Oh, he would add, sotto voce, "Stay away from the mountain beaver burgers this year," with no explanation. But like I said earlier, the locals never eat those things anyway.



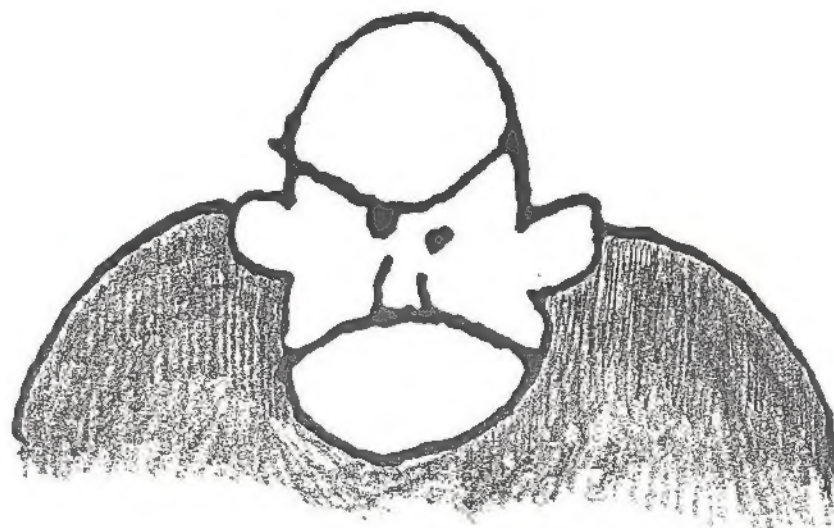




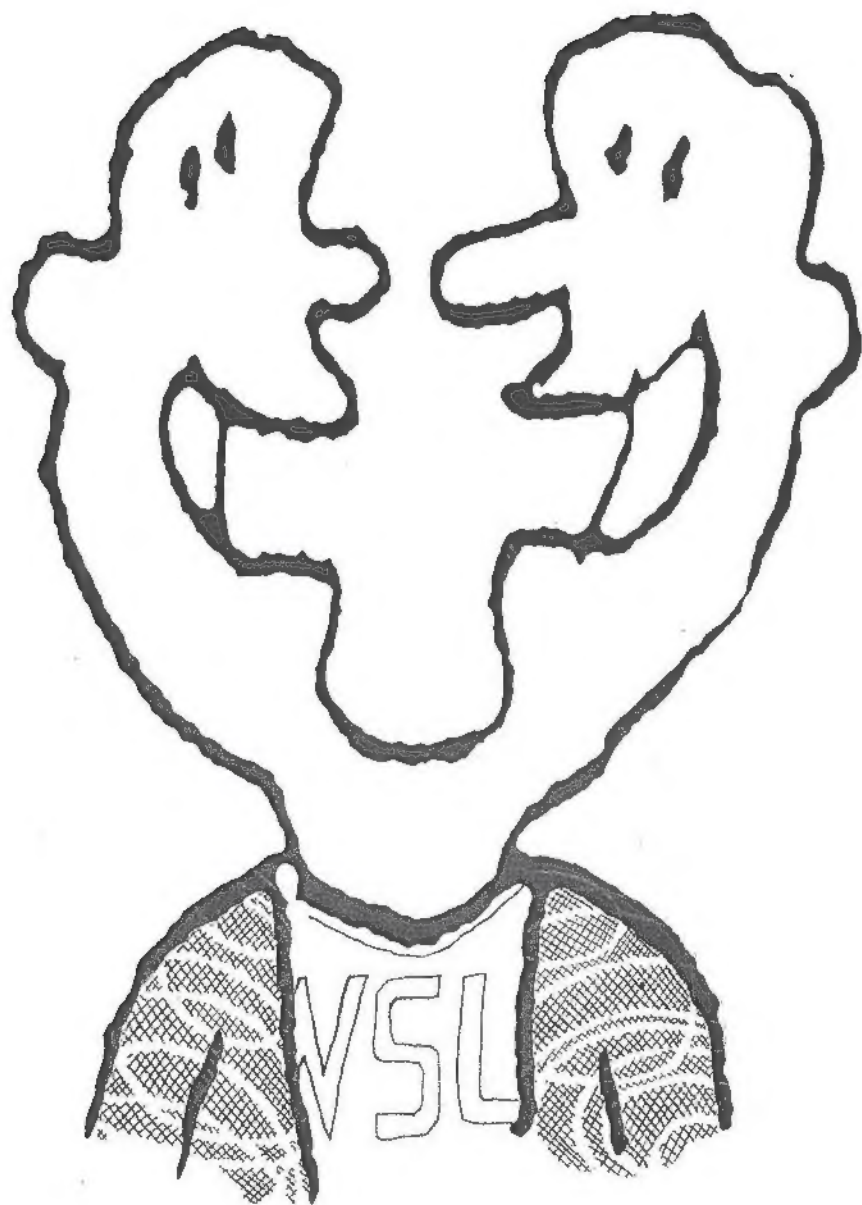
But rumors take on a life of their own. Fairy Thiessen, town poetess and performance artist, gleefully pranced through town singing ditties like, "Oh I wish I was a Bezango Mayor weiner ...," and, "Who bit the big one so you can take a big bite?"

Frankly, the citizens of Bezango were starting to get nauseous not only at the thought of mountain beaver burgers, but of eating meat in general.

The high point in the life of this chunk of gossip belonged to Jack Gorch. It was Jack's shift behind the bar at the Head Loader. One night, when the place was packed, he suddenly announced in a loud monotone, "Must ... tune ... into ... special ... message." He then went to the television, which was broadcasting a ping-pong tournament featuring the Seattle Sockeyes (a local favorite) and tuned into KANT-TV. The picture seemed unusually fuzzy, and a funny looking little man, not Dr. Nixon, was speaking German in a weird high-pitched voice. The man would pause, and Jack would translate the message in a dull, trancelike monotone. The essence of the dispatch was this: Humans are not on the top of the food chain, and what comes around goes around. So watch it!



Although Jack is not known as a joker, we do note his eyepatch doesn't always cover the same eye. Still, there did seem something real about his delivery that night. Even the designated drivers thought so.



The Googybugg Siamese twins aren't like the normal type of Siamese twins you see every day. These two each exist in a different parallel universe and rejoin once or twice a year. Then they compare stories about their respective Bezangos. Tommy Googybugg is the one who exists in the Bezango we all know and love. Timmy Googybugg lives in the other, slightly different Bezango. In Timmy's half, Still Waters' robe had cowboy designs, Buncombe Dragon was elected Governor, and Elton Flemm's mother was in the same bowling league as Conway Twitty's wife. Also, when Jack Gorch changed the channel on the TV in the Head Loader, he merely tuned into a rerun of "Petticoat Junction."

So in Timmy's Bezango, life went on as normal as it can get ...



But in our Bezango, it would be a year before anyone got up the courage to eat any meat. And now you know why an entire town went vegetarian for 12 months. Ah, Bezango, my home.

